



Single Parenting

How to avoid being overwhelmed...
and how to support a single parent.



Being a parent is one of the most challenging jobs a person can have. And if you are both a mother and a father to your children, it can feel overwhelming at times. Whether you are a single parent as a result of a death, a separation/divorce, or a choice to do it on your own, being a single parent may mean working twice as hard, but it's not only doable, it can be very rewarding.

If you are a single parent, here are a few suggestions:

Develop a reliable support network. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you're feeling burdened or stressed (e.g. immediate family members, close friends, a community support group). Allowing others to help you can be a gift to both you and the person assisting you.

Share your responsibilities in creative ways. If you need time for yourself, consider swapping babysitting time with a neighbour; assign children age-appropriate chores and tasks, arrange for car pools or children's play dates with each other; etc.

Maintain rituals and traditions. If the family has been disrupted by divorce or death, maintain bedtime rituals, special family times, and holiday celebrations in order to create a stabilizing force and keep your family ties strong.

Keep organized and put effort into managing time well. Everyone benefits when you establish routines and schedules. For example, prepare and freeze meals ahead of time or require that children put toys away, themselves, when they are finished playing with them.

Create a stable, nurturing home. Children benefit from stability and security, even more so if they have recently lost a parent through separation/divorce or death. When you are with your children make an effort to be emotionally present for them. If you are recently single, your children may need you now more than ever. They need to know that life will go on and they will be okay.

Establish clear boundaries. Parenting is not about equality, it is about loving your children and being caretaker of their needs and well-being. Having clear rules and guidelines for your child's behaviour helps establish your rightful position as parent of your child.

Foster open communications. Good communication is critical for all families. Try holding regular family meetings and discuss how everyone is feeling using age-appropriate communication.

Take care of yourself. In addition to taking care of your child(ren), attend to your own self-care (e.g. diet, exercise, regular sleep, relaxation time). When you take care of yourself, you become more patient with tolerating the challenges that children present, and you increase the likelihood that you respond to these challenges more lovingly and effectively.



The bottom line

By maintaining a positive attitude and focusing on the benefits of single parenting, single parenthood can be very rewarding. Many single parents treasure their newfound autonomy and independence and are hopeful about the future. Often single-parent families become more interdependent, working together to deal with concerns that may arise. While balancing multiple jobs with full responsibilities for home and family may not be easy, it does make us stronger.

Go easy on yourself. No matter how loving and competent you are, recognize that you are doing the work of two people. Give yourself credit for the job you are doing and don't feel guilty. Take pride in your ability to provide a good home and foundation for your children. Focus on your successes and see any "failures" as opportunities to learn to do things differently.

How to support a single parent

Chances are good that you know someone who is a single parent, considering that 16 percent of all Canadian families with dependent children are single parents. Here are some ways you can make a difference to single parent families:

Offer to babysit, so the parent can go out and do something for him or herself.

Be a good friend and check in from time to time to see if your emotional support is needed or if there is anything you could help with around the home.

Be a good listener and only give advice if it is asked for. If you have gone through a similar experience you may share what your situation was like, keeping in mind that everyone's experiences will be different.

If you have good rapport with the children, find ways to spend one-on-one time with them. They may appreciate having someone they can confide in. Some children may avoid telling their parent how they are feeling because they feel guilty adding to their problems.

We want your questions, comments, and suggestions.

E-mail us at healthyfamilies@humansolutions.ca.

For more information, to book a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services our Client Services Representatives are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

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